

The Experimental Television Center

A Proposal for Low Cost Retrieval of Early Videotapes Produced on Obsolete Equipment and/or Videotape that Will Not Play Back.

Or

The Resurrection Bus

Due to manufacturing errors, changes in videotape machinery and videotape formats, and not a hell of a lot of experience on anyone's part, there are some immediate, obvious problems that need solving when considering the transfer of early videotapes.

The tapes concerned are the reel to reel tapes made from the late 1960s to about 1975. This includes several formats of 1/2", 1/4", and maybe some 1" videotape. Information on 2" tape needs only to be transferred by commercial services still currently available.

The tapes were the result of the invention of low cost video production capability and made by people who were concerned with the issues of their time. Resurrecting must be based on the tapemakers' views of the importance of the original intention and not on current commercial, or exhibition value or collectibility. Most, if not all, of these tapes can be identified in quick fashion. It is imperative to find the original tapes. That seems to be possible also.

The focus should be on the tapemakers and whether or not the makers want the material to be salvaged. Collectors, including museums, galleries, media centers and individuals should be resources for identifying the tapes and not primary sources of tapes for salvage in any preservation effort.

The makers should be actively involved in this preservation attempt, as salvagers, financiers, or in any way they can. Otherwise our efforts are not reasonable.

The original material needs to be identified. The makers need to decide how and whether they want their work to be revived. We need to offer the possibility of help to that end.

Once the material is identified and the cooperation of the maker or current owner is obtained, then an attempt could be made to redo the old stuff to new stuff keeping the original video intention intact.

A vehicle would be outfitted with all early formats. I think I have them. My machines need to be reconditioned but I think I also have most parts needed. To facilitate transfer Frame Synchronizers, ProcAmps, Magic, Candles and Prayer Rugs would be available. The transfers would be made to a current videotape format. The choice of what format to transfer to would be up to the owner of the material. All current videotape formats would be available.

The vehicle would travel to the tapes, cancelling the potential for loss of the original material. In the case of cities ie. New York, a place would be found to house the service for the time needed for the transfers.

To facilitate the transfers, it seems desirable to send ahead a tape cleaning machine. The machine would be constructed so that the owners of the tapes could understand and use it to clean the tapes. Cleaning is the most time consuming part of the process of retrieving the information and so could be the most expensive part of the process. The videotape maker/owners or their designees would be expected to be involved with the process. Perhaps regional media centers could offer this service at low cost for owners who couldn't serve themselves. We would still supply the means of cleaning.

This would be a one shot deal, not an ongoing service. Once the tapes are transferred to a current format there is no further need for the service.

This service is offered in the spirit of the original intention of the tapemakers and of the times when the tapes were made. It is, in fact, an attempt to reclaim the past lost to the ambition of makers of machines and consumer hunger for new technology. The past was lost not only with hardware development but also with faulty videotape. I don't blame the originators of the machines or gooey videotape manufacturers. None of us knew what we were doing. Do we ever? However, I would expect the makers of both to be spiritually, and financially involved in this effort.

This is, of course, a rough proposal, but also a commitment on my part to develop the idea further if there is reason to do so. It seems to me that the project could be limited to this state or has a potential to cover the entire country. Interest and moneys available would determine the scale of involvement.

If the idea is sensible to this group then I am willing to do the research, find out how much it will cost and what else it takes to develop a workable definition of the idea. If not then I won't.

I can be reached by mail at the TV Center and by phone. I prefer mail.

Ralph Hocking
1990